



**BOSTON  
CHILDREN'S  
MUSEUM**

## **KYO-NO-MACHIYA JAPANESE HOUSE EXHIBITION GLOSSARY OF TERMS and CULTURE NOTES**

1. **Kyo-no-machiya -- Townhouse from Kyoto<sup>1</sup>**  
Kyoto townhouses are the oldest in Japan. The style has become a model of townhouse architecture.
2. **Genkan -- Entry hallway**  
Where one takes off shoes before entering the rooms of the home, and puts on shoes before going outside.
3. **Geta-bako -- Shoe shelf<sup>2</sup>**  
Shelf in the *genkan* where shoes and house slippers are kept.
4. **Mise-no-ma -- Front room/shop**  
The first room in the *Kyo-no-machiya*. This is where the family sold their silk goods.
5. **Tatami -- Straw floor mats**  
Made of a tightly-packed core of rice straw covered with a fine layer of woven rush, and bordered on the two lengths with cloth. *Tatami* mats are uniform in size (about 2 inches thick, 3 feet wide by 6 feet long), which makes them the main modular measurement in traditional Japanese architecture. Room size is determined by number of mats.
6. **Fusuma -- Opaque paper-covered sliding panel**  
Paper stretched over both sides of a wooden frame; acts as doors inside walls and between rooms. *Fusuma* can be removed by lifting doors from track to create a larger room.
7. **Shoji -- Translucent paper-covered sliding panel**  
Paper stretched over one side of a light wooden frame, arranged in rectangular patterns. Thin *shoji* paper allows light to filter through. Acts as doors, windows, and walls. Unlike *fusuma*, which divide interior rooms, *shoji* are used primarily to divide interior from exterior -- or to divide the hallway where house slippers are worn from the *tatami* mat rooms where slippers are not worn.
8. **Tansu -- Chest of drawers**  
This one originally stored bolts of silk and silk ribbons.
9. **Naka-no-ma -- Middle room**  
Has many uses<sup>3</sup>: eating, sleeping, entertaining. Also, the staircase to the 2nd floor is accessed through this room.
10. **Kotatsu -- Low heated table**

Square table with electric heater attached to the underside. In wintertime, a quilt-like cover is inserted between the tabletop and frame, the heater is plugged in, and one sits with the cover over the lap, thus keeping warm.

**11. Oshiire -- Closet**

This one is used for storing bedding (*futon*), and seating cushions (*zabuton*).

**12. Kamidana -- Family Shinto shrine<sup>4</sup>**

Home of Shinto spirits. Family prays here for good health, business, and happiness.

**13. Zashiki -- Innermost/Guest room**

Main room of the house. More formal than the middle room (*naka-no-ma*). Always has an alcove for decorations (*tokonoma*). Has many uses: eating, sleeping, entertaining, etc.

**14. Butsudan -- Family Buddhist altar<sup>5</sup>**

Place where family pays respect to Buddha and family ancestors. It is common to have both a *Butsudan* and *Kamidana* (Shinto shrine) in a household.

**15. Tokonoma -- Decorative alcove**

Used to display flower arrangements, a hanging seasonal scroll or seasonal objects. The room in which the *tokonoma* is located is the most formal room of the house.

**16. Engawa -- Porch and passageway**

Narrow wooden floor space for sitting and enjoying the garden (*tsubo niwa*). Also serves as the walkway to the room with sink (*senmenjo*), the bath (*furo*), the toilet (*toire*), and the kitchen (*daidokoro*).

**17. Senmenjo -- Room with sink**

Where one would wash the face, brush the teeth, and change clothes before and after entering the bath. In Japan the functions of the bathroom are separated into three rooms: *senmenjo*, bath (*furo*), toilet (*toire*).

**18. Furo -- Bath<sup>6</sup>**

Contains the showering mechanism and bathtub. Wooden drainboards are set above tile floor where one washes and rinses with water from a small bucket before soaking in the tub of hot water.

**19. Toire -- Toilet**

For both sexes, used by standing or squatting. This modern style conserves water: When one flushes, water runs out of the spigot at the top, where hands are rinsed. This water is then stored in the tank, and becomes the water that runs through for the next flush. (Today, many houses have Western-style toilets, some actually "high tech.") One always wears special bathroom slippers when using the *toire*.

**20. Toriniwa -- Passageway**

Route to kitchen (*daidokoro*).

**21. Daidokoro -- Kitchen**

Ours was modernized in the early 1970s, with new appliances installed such as a gas water heater (*yuwakashi*), located above the kitchen sink.

**22. Mizudana -- Cabinet**

This is where bowls, plates, etc. are stored.



**23. Hotei-san -- God of wealth**

One of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune. Statue to bring good fortune to the family business. (This is NOT Buddha!) The family that originally owned this house had a collection of *Hotei-san*, and donated it to us along with the house.

**24. Noren -- Curtain**

Partial curtains that divide rooms, hung from the top of doorways. Often split into two or three sections, they serve as visual room dividers. This one prevents a view directly into the kitchen from the street.

**25. Rokujo ma -- Six tatami mat room, 2nd floor**

Similar to middle room (*naka-no-ma*) on the first floor. Used for sleeping or studying, etc.

**26. Chashitsu -- Tea room**

This room is equipped for formal tea ceremony capabilities.

**27. Chigaidana -- Ornamental shelves**

Located in the smallest alcove adjoining the *tokonoma*, these shelves display pottery, dolls, or other decorations. The presence of a *chigaidana* increases the formality or specialness of the *tokonoma*, making the room even more formal.

**28. Nando -- Storage room**

Space for storing goods such as seasonal clothing, paintings or household objects.

**29. Yaneura beya -- Attic**

Space under roof. Ours is reached by a ladder. Also a space for storing more fragile goods like *tatami* mats or old furniture.

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**CULTURE NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> **Kyo-no-machiya**

Kyoto was the capital of Japan for about one thousand years, from the 8th to the 19th centuries.

Our townhouse came from the district in Kyoto called Nishijin, famous for silk and textiles. This house was originally built approximately 100 years ago, and the family that resided in it for several generations was a family of silk weavers and merchants.

By the 1970s, the house was empty, and in 1979, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Boston-Kyoto Sister City Relationship, the city of Kyoto decided to offer this house to Boston as a gift. That was the time that Boston Children's Museum was moving from Jamaica Plain to its present location on Fort Point Channel, and the city of Boston decided to house the *Kyo-no-machiya* here. So as BCM was being constructed, so was this townhouse -- in its entirety, and exactly as the original.

**General note on Japanese residential architecture**

The main goal of Japanese architecture is openness: A raised floor and walls removable for air circulation; the use of porous materials like wood, clay, and paper to counter humidity; and low overhanging eaves to keep the interior cool -- these characteristics are found in traditional houses, in temples, and in shrines.

It is generally held that materials should be deployed in as natural a manner as possible. Paint is thus seldom used. Depending on the life span of the material, paper, even *tatami*, may be replaced and earthen surfaces redaubed. Since wooden buildings can be renovated bit by bit, the life span of the Japanese house can be several hundred years, and the idea of replacing parts, instead of the whole, pervades traditional Japanese attitudes toward building construction.

## <sup>2</sup> The custom of taking off the shoes

Some say that the removal of one's shoes when stepping indoors symbolizes the leaving of the outer world behind, and the entering into the private world of home; it is a way to clearly distinguish between the public and the private, the chaotic and the calm.

Another explanation is the following, "Japanese would say that in the West the house floor is treated as an extension of the road: People tread upon the floor wearing shoes, performing the activities of daily life above, but never on the floor. The floor in a Japanese house, in contrast, is thought of as an extension of the bed (indeed, the same character is used to write both words). Everyday activities take place at floor level."

## <sup>3</sup> Multi-functionality of rooms in a Japanese house

The function of the room -- eating, sleeping, working -- can be changed easily by the placement of a screen, the opening or closing of sliding doors, or the spreading out or removal of bedding. A "bedroom" is merely a room that happens to have bedding laid out at that moment.

## <sup>4</sup> Shinto

Japan's oldest "religion," sometimes translated as "The Way of the Gods." Lacking a dogma, the emphasis is on living in harmony with nature, and recognition of *kami* (deities or gods). There are two categories of *kami*, (1) the superior beings of the creation myths, and (2) *kami* of the countryside, to whom appeal was made for fertility and good harvests, and those spirits of lakes and rivers, mountains and forest, particular trees and stones. Shinto has always been able to coexist in Japan with Buddhism and Christianity in a symbiotic relationship.

## <sup>5</sup> Buddhism

Mahayana Buddhism was brought to Japan from China in the 6th century and influenced early Japanese society significantly. As a philosophy, Buddhism has had a deep influence on the way Japanese people approach the business of living and dying. Funerary rites and rituals associated with one's ancestors are usually Buddhist.

## <sup>6</sup> Furo: The Japanese Bath

The bath is a very distinctive feature of Japan, as bathing holds a special place in the culture, and the customs differ from what Westerners might be used to. The *o-furo* is used only for warming and relaxing the body. The tub is deep enough for the water to cover the shoulders of a seated adult. One washes completely with soap and rinses with shower head or bucket before entering the tub of hot water. The same water is used by everyone in the family, and the tub is covered between bathers to keep the water hot.

Traditionally, baths are taken in the evening/night. It is common for small children to bathe with their mother or father, and the time is valued as an opportunity to talk about what happened during the day.